Removing Roadblocks on the Path to Success

Chambers are key players in ensuring students continue their education past high school.

By Jessie Azrilian

Every community is unique, with different tangible and intangible assets. In a globally competitive economy, a community’s most valuable asset is human capital, i.e. its workforce. Nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the next five years will require some form of post-secondary education, according to Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. At current rates of degree attainment, most communities will face a critical gap in filling high-demand jobs with skilled and certified workers.
Business organizations share an imperative to understand how their economies are structured, what differentiates their communities, and their communities’ competitive advantage. To assess workforce needs, chambers of commerce convene education advisory committees, survey employers and students, compile labor market data, and publish comprehensive education report cards. Through fostering an ongoing community dialogue, chambers are able to align the outputs of the education system to match the true needs of their economy and labor force.

There are countless reasons why students fail to continue their education and obtain high wage, high demand careers. Greater communication and collaboration between business sectors and educators has revealed prominent barriers to achieving success in college and career:

• If you can’t envision your future career, you probably won’t go to college.
• If you don’t graduate from high school, you won’t go to college.
• If you don’t apply or enroll for college, you won’t go.
• If you can’t pay for college, you won’t go.
• If you aren’t prepared academically, you probably won’t graduate from college.

To address these barriers, chambers across the country have established strategies to support students along critical points of the cradle-to-career education pipeline.

**A Future in STEM**

Labor markets vary across communities, but one common denominator in every region is the need for workers with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) skills. Career pathways and work-based learning experiences, inside and outside of the classroom, expose students to careers and futures they had never previously imagined. Chambers have engaged employers, parents, and educators in a variety of ways that provide opportunities for students to learn about and access high demand STEM careers. Here are a few:

**Dallas: Future Focus Camp**

After hearing from local educators that students lacked awareness about potential career paths, the Dallas Regional Chamber decided to test different types of curricula and activities that would help students make connections between academics and career; provide tangible workforce skills that allowed students to “learn and earn” during high school and after graduation; involved member companies that needed talent and wanted to engage students directly. Partnering with Accenture Consulting, GE, and other member companies, the chamber launched the Future Focus Camp that gave Dallas sophomores and juniors hands-on experience with corporate operations through site visits and one-on-one mentoring from employers. Students also practiced writing resumes and sat through mock interviews. All students reported a high comfort level interviewing for a job, and earned digital badges for resume writing and interview skills through dallascityoflearning.org.

**Results:** 78 students representing 24 area high schools participated; $3,000 in grants were earned by students for professional clothing; 123 volunteers from 48 businesses devoted over 400 volunteer hours.

**Little Rock: Summer STEM**

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) College of Engineering and Information Technology (EIT) summer programs, funded in partnership with the metro Little Rock business community, exposes underrepresented groups to STEM careers by covering all costs for participants. Every summer, 145 students from 6-12th grade reside on the college campus and are immersed in high level academic sessions with hands-on labs designed by certified instructors and college professors.

• The Engineering Scholars Program is a one-week exploration of different engineering disciplines with project work in robotics and construction practices through a hands-on civil engineering lab.
• The High School Research Program is three-week program giving highly motivated students an opportunity to work on college-level research with faculty across different disciplines.
• The National Summer Transportation Institute provides students an in-depth look at civil engineering careers in land, air, and water transportation.

**Results:** More than 71% of student that participate in EIT’s summer programs matriculate into STEM disciplines after graduating from high school.

**Spokane STEM**

The No. 1 priority of Greater Spokane Inc. (GSI) is “talent, talent, talent.” The state of Washington ranks No. 1 in the concentration of STEM jobs, which mostly require some form of education after high school. GSI houses Spokane STEM, a community partnership focused on transforming how STEM is taught in the classroom by engaging students, parents and teachers in experiential learning opportunities. Teaching the Teachers (T3) connects educators with employers in STEM fields to get hands-on experience with leading industries. Teachers are then better equipped to teach students the skills that will be valuable after graduation and link academics to future careers.

**Results:** Since 2007, 850 educators from 20 school districts have been paired with more than 50 businesses, reaching 21,000 students.
Improving Graduation Rates

Even though national dropout rates are decreasing across most demographics, graduation rates among minority and low-income students, who represent the majority of students in public schools, still lag 10-15 points behind their white and upper-income peers, respectively. Career and technical-focused education (CTE) models in high school reduce dropout rates because they help students link academics to skills they will need in the real world, and they offer an array of experiences with potential career paths, especially for at-risk students. Most career and technical education programs allow students to accrue credit hours towards a degree, industry certifications and badges, and quality credentials. Examples of CTE models include converting large high schools into smaller career-focused academies or learning communities. Other models include dual-enrollment programs, early middle college programs, and high school apprenticeships. Here are some examples:

San Antonio: SA Works!

This industry-led program helped make San Antonio a national model for experiential learning. The Chamber works to align K-12 education with existing community-based career and technical programs to meet specific high skill workforce needs. One facet of the program offers high school students multiple options to explore career pathways:

- **Endorsements:** Incoming Freshmen specify an endorsement they intend to earn upon entering 9th grade, based on options such as STEM, Business & Industry, and Public Services. Selection of an endorsement creates an opportunity for students to participate in CTE programs that align with their chosen field of study.
- **Practica:** Students gain real-world job experience through a paid internship during school hours chosen from a menu of 16 industries.
- **Alamo HS Academy:** A renowned program that has opened doors to hundreds of high school students with college-level training in aerospace, information technology, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare.

Jackson (MI): Early/Middle College

Early/Middle College engages high school students that are interested in technical trades and drawn to education experiences outside of the traditional high school learning environment. The Jackson Area College and Career Connection (JAC^3) Early/Middle College (E/MC) Program is offered through collaboration between Jackson County high schools, the Jackson Area Career Center, local colleges and the Enterprise Group. Employers not only sponsor each student financially, they commit to the success of each student from day one by providing mentoring, hands-on training, and future career opportunities. Students divide their time between the classroom and the workplace of sponsoring employers, and at the end of the five-year high school program, students are on track to high-demand and high-paying careers. Students will receive their diploma, up to 64 credit hours (Associate’s Degree) certified through local college programs, and a technical certification, all tuition free with no costs to students or their families.
It’s the buying power you need to help outfit your new office.

Will you be ready when growth presents itself?
Get ready at OPEN.com

the journey never stops
Increasing Application and Enrollment Rates

Quality data collected from pre-K to graduation is a strong tool to predict success in college and beyond. But tracking students’ activity after high school can provide indicators for why some college-intending students do not continue their education. Student surveys indicate that uncertainty about college costs and financial aid, confusing application processes and overall college-readiness are the main reasons students identify as barriers to matriculation. Factors such as accessing transcripts, confirming immigration status, knowing what questions to ask, and a lack of transportation can be a large hindrance. These factors affect minority, low-income, and first-generation students disproportionately. Interventions such as personalized text messages, peer mentoring, and counseling during high school and the summer after graduation have significantly helped college-intending, low income students.

Austin: College Ready Now

Surveys of Metro Austin high school students have shown a 20% gap in students who indicate plans to continue their education and those who actually enroll in college. The chamber funds the UT-Ray Marshall Center to find out what prevents 20% of students from continuing their education and where schools and businesses could help. The Student Futures Project, now in its fifth year, has identified trends from 27,000 students surveyed thus far that participating school districts can use to improve programs. The chamber focused on helping students matriculate by:

• Lobbying 15 school districts to add a college enrollment manager at each high school
• Simplifying the college application process by pushing Texas colleges to accept a Common Texas Application
• Addressing the “Summer Melt,” when college-intending students fail to enroll in the fall following high school graduation, by extending counselor contracts over the summer at 19 high schools to help students complete enrollment milestones

Boost your chamber’s non-dues revenue with eCertify!

eCertify provides chambers of commerce with a user-friendly online solution that enables them to electronically process Certificates of Origin and other trade documents for exporters and freight forwarders.

Benefits include:
> Add value to membership
> Attract new members and extend chamber services
> Implement COO best practice and reduce risk of liability

What’s in it for your members? Unparalleled productivity gains!
> Save money – helps cut courier costs
> Save time – eliminate paper-based processes


Contact Carman Rossi
1330 Braddock Place, Suite 300
Alexandria VA 22314
Ph: 703 998 3573
Accomplishing your Chambers’ year-long goals is as simple as joining the Constant Contact Chamber Program.

We’ve been helping Chambers grow for years. In fact, everything we do is geared toward strengthening small businesses—and the institutions that champion them. With our easy-to-use online marketing tools and free personal coaching, we help you reach current and new members, and develop deeper, long-lasting relationships with them and the community.

Constant Contact®
CHAMBER PROGRAM

Learn more at ConstantContact.com/chamberprogram
**Results:** In 48 months, local college application rates increased 50%; college enrollment increased 30%.

**Jacksonville: Chamber Text Campaign**

In an effort to reduce the information barrier, the JAX Chamber, through its collaborative Earn Up initiative, launched a text alert program aimed at helping first generation and low income students transition to college. High school students, parents and mentors in Northeast Florida sign up to receive application, scholarship and orientation information from colleges of their choice; deadlines for financial aid and the ACT and SAT, and motivational quotes about perseverance.

**Bloomington (IN): Graduation Coaches**

Dropout prevention is the focus of the Greater Bloomington Chamber’s Graduation Coach Initiative, which helps at-risk students stay in high school, graduate, and get a good job or continue their education. The chamber hired graduation coaches to work with faculty at three area high schools. Each coach has a caseload of 50-60 students who are at-risk of dropping out as indicated by low GPA’s, low credit attainment, or poor attendance. Coaches monitor grades and attendance, build supportive relationships, provide one-on-one counseling, and connect with parents. The Graduation Coaches program is part of the chamber’s Franklin Initiative which works with teachers and schools to offer real-world experiences that get students excited about their future education and careers.

**Results:** Since the Franklin Initiative began, the chamber has helped boost Monroe County graduation rates from 81% to 95%. Some 200 students are helped each year.

**L.A. Cash for College Program**

For staff at the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce (L.A. Area Chamber), the highlight of the year is the annual College and Career Convention, an all-hands-on-deck event that provides college access and success opportunities to more than 10,000 students and their families each year.

The two-day convention is a “one-stop” college preparation event with college life seminars, interactive career demonstrations, financial aid presentations, an exhibit hall with college and university representatives from across the nation, and information about scholarship opportunities.

The Convention is part of the L.A. Area Chamber’s L.A. Cash for College program, the region’s largest financial aid awareness campaign. It is comprised of a year-long series of integrated events and activities conducted throughout Los Angeles to create a college-going culture with a focus on increasing participation of low-income, first-generation students, foster youth, undocumented and especially Latino and African American college-bound high school seniors.

The program was developed 14 years ago in response to research showing that while most parents wanted their children to pursue college, knowledge about college and financial aid opportunities was lacking. Today, L.A. Cash for College is recognized by the White House Initiative on Education Excellence for Hispanics. To learn more about the program, visit [lacashforcollege.org](http://lacashforcollege.org).

--- Analidia Blakely
During National School Choice Week (January 24 - 30, 2016), spread the word about all of the K-12 education options available to children in your community! Sign up today to receive your chamber of commerce’s free box of supplies, including yellow fleece scarves, signs, placards, a banner, and more. You can use these materials at one of your chamber’s January meetings. Learn more at SchoolChoiceWeek.com/Chambers. Participation is completely free, and more than 250 chambers have already registered to participate!
Charleston (SC) Scholarship Fund

Accelerate Greater Charleston, the Charleston Metro Chamber’s economic development blueprint, has a scholarship fund for students graduating from the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce Career Academy. They offer students a two-year scholarship to their local community college covering tuition, books, and supplies. The preference goes to students with a 2.0 to 2.9 GPA who show the potential to be successful, but don’t qualify for tuition assistance through the South Carolina Lottery. Teachers help identify promising students, then the chamber assists selected students with the application process and pays their $30 application fee, which can be a deterrent that keeps some students from applying. During the two-year pilot, the chamber awarded 27 scholarships, mainly to first generation students. All 12 students in the first scholarship cohort have successfully completed their first year at Trident Community College.

Detroit: Matching Contributions

In 2015, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce launched the Detroit Scholarship Fund to provide a tuition-free path to an associate degree or technical certificate at one of five partner community colleges for any high school graduate in Detroit. It’s a matching contribution fund, so students must complete the FAFSA, and the fund will cover any difference for tuition and fees not covered by the federal Pell or state Tuition Incentive Program.

Newnan-Coweta (GA) Seed Funding:

The Central Educational Center (CEC) is a venture of the business community, Coweta County School System and West Central Technical College to prepare students for the Atlanta-area high tech labor market. To help meet the workforce demands of the region’s healthcare industry, the Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce provides seed funding for “scholarships” that allow CEC high school students that were dual-enrolled in a college certificate program to pay for and successfully complete the national Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) exam.

Results: Since the chamber began providing scholarships, the number of students who successfully complete both the Nurse Aide College Certificate program and the national CNA exam has grown more than 50%. The placement rate (job or higher education) for those who successfully graduate from this program has been above 80% since its inclusion in the CEC program.

Increasing College and Career Readiness

The national graduation rate is up to 81%, higher than it’s ever been, but a diploma does not mean that someone is ready for college or a career. Today, nearly 20% of four-year college students and more than 50% of two-year college students are enrolled in remedial coursework. A U.S. Department of Education study found that only 17% of students enrolled in remedial reading and 27% percent of students enrolled in remedial math earn a bachelor’s degree. American students also lag behind international peers in key subjects, demonstrating that our education system has not kept pace with those of developed and developing countries around the globe. Preparing students to be globally competitive in a 21st century economy means creating lifelong learners from the cradle onward. Here are some examples of cradle-to-career initiatives that prepare students to be lifelong learners and to meet the challenges of credit-bearing college courses and high-performance, high-growth jobs:

Pre-k investment/Kindergarten-Readiness

The data on early childhood education says that it works. The most cited research, conducted by Nobel Laureate James Heckman, breaks the case down into business language: the earlier you invest in childhood development, the greater the return. Essentially, the cost of high quality early education pays for itself in economic benefits two-fold, which is why chambers are among a growing group of business organizations to get on the early education bandwagon.

Decatur-Morgan County (AL): Starting Strong Pre-K

The Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce’s Quality Education Committee established the “Starting Strong Pre-K” initiative to expand access to pre-K for all children in Morgan County while also applying for grants and fundraising. The initiative is a partnership among the chamber, Decatur-Morgan County’s Minority Development Association, the United Way of Morgan County and the Community Action Partnership of North Alabama.

The Alabama School Readiness Alliance hosted a ribbon-cutting for a Pre-K classroom, recognizing the collaborative efforts of the Starting Strong Pre-K initiative in Morgan County, AL.
IMAGINE....

YOUR CHAMBER

BRINGING

Google Street View

INSIDE

YOUR MEMBER BUSINESSES!

Now THAT'S an

AFFINITY PROGRAM

Make It Your's!

STREETVIEWINDOORS.COM
Results: Through grants and fundraising, the group has added 15 new pre-K classrooms since 2013, giving 260 young people access to voluntary pre-K programming.

“Every child should be given the tools and the chance to be successful. And that’s why Pre-K education matters,” says John Seymour, president and CEO, Decatur-Morgan County Chamber. “Kids who have a pre-K experience show very positive effects on achievement, grade retention and social behavior, even at age 10 and higher. They also show a more significant growth in emotional development and lower percentage of delinquency, drop out and crime.”

Kansas City (MO): Kindergarten-Readiness

The Greater Kansas City Chamber’s Big 5 economic development blueprint was narrowed down from 182 ideas derived after hours of deliberation by about 100 business, civic, and elected leaders. One of the five pillars of the strategic plan was building Kansas City’s Workforce of Tomorrow through Kindergarten Readiness. The “ABCs” of this initiative are:

- **Assessment:** Determine the early childhood education assets already in place and measure success along the way.
- **Buy-in:** Promote community investment of the necessary time, energy, and dollars to achieve the goal.
- **Collaboration:** Bring together the resources, organizations, and people already working in kindergarten-readiness, and strategically focus those efforts.

Winston-Salem: Third Grade Reading Proficiency

Created through a collaboration with the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, this program aims to improve the reading performance of K-2nd grade students, so that each tutored child will be at or above the expected proficiency level by the time they enter third grade. Volunteers read and interact with students following a reading curriculum called Bookworms, which was reviewed and aligned by teachers to meet district reading standards.

Results: The program serves 15 elementary schools where most students are low-income. During the 2014-15 school year, 333 volunteers from 78 of the chamber’s member businesses and organizations worked with 559 K-2nd grade students.

College- and Career-Ready by High School

Employers have different needs in skills and knowledge that match their industry sector. While a strong technical education is important for setting students on a path to high demand STEM fields, business-focused training stresses 21st century skills that are transferrable across all industry sectors. As employers increasingly voice the need for employees that are able to think critically, collaborate, and communicate effectively, programs emphasize traits that are not directly taught in a traditional education setting such as professionalism, interview skills, social media acumen, and email etiquette.

Northern Kentucky: Work Ethics Diploma

In response to employers saying students were not graduating from high school “career ready,” the Northern Kentucky Chamber convened business, educators and post-secondary representatives to develop standards that measured students’ work ethic. The objective was for employers to recognize a
WE DRIVE TRAFFIC to your MEMBERS

Generate REVENUE for your Chamber of Commerce and bring VALUE to your members!

- Online Directory Advertising
- Social Media Management
- Business Listing Management
- Concierge Services
- Media Production Services

Contact Us Today!

John Baker
Director of Business Development
Direct: (585) 410-6664
jbaker@ypcmmedia.com

Jennifer LaRose
National Program Manager
Direct: (585) 410-6627
jlarose@ypcmmedia.com

YPCMEDIA.COM
common, identifiable metric of work standards that would serve as a filter for potential candidates. Included in the diploma standards were attendance, absenteeism, tardiness, community service/internship, discipline, GPA, organization, flexibility, time management, punctuality, respectfulness, and teamwork. Students, on their end, would have portable and recognized credentials signifying their commitment to success in the workforce.

**Results:** 10,000 students from approximately 27 high schools received the chamber’s special diploma, with an average of 1,200 recipients from each senior class.

**Cincinnati, Nashville, Austin: Education Report Cards**

Chambers can often serve as “the critical friend” in order to hold themselves and their communities accountable for the career preparedness of their workforce. The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, the Nashville Area Chamber and the Greater Austin Chamber are examples of chambers that have partnered with their area school districts to publish annual education report cards that benchmark the college and career-readiness of their region’s K-12 students. The data collected for these reports helps profile the needs of school districts in terms of leadership, policy, and budgeting. Districts then establish goals based on those needs. For example, the Nashville chamber’s 2014 Education Report Card praised the school system for reducing the number of students struggling in the lowest-performing schools and increasing the number of schools listed as “excelling” or “achieving” to 34 from 24 during the previous school year. One of the five recommendations based on the report card was for school districts to wait to elect school directors until after the 2015 mayoral race. The majority of Nashville citizens surveyed for the report card thought education should be the No. 1 priority for Nashville’s new mayor, so this recommendation would help align the school system with the city’s political leadership to bring about more broad-based progress at a faster pace.

**Future Workforce**

The private sector invests $500 billion annually in workforce training, which means employers make up 63% of post-secondary training in the U.S. As such, the business community has a huge influence, and employers are becoming a more integral part of workforce training.

**Youth Apprenticeship: Fond du Lac (WI)S**

High School youth apprenticeship programs give students an opportunity to get a diploma, certification from the U.S. Dept. of Labor or other high quality recognized credentials, two years on the job experience, and likely a job offer, all the while either getting paid or at no cost. Through apprenticeships, students learn that a strong academic foundation, technical know-how and an appreciation for lifelong learning are traits employers seek when hiring new employees. Fond du Lac’s Youth Apprenticeship program began in 1994—as a partnership among local school districts, businesses, Moraine Park Technical College and the Fond du Lac Area Association of Commerce—with four students from one high school participating in a machining course. The program was ramped up in 2011 after a “Retirement & Departure Intentions Survey” revealed that half the county’s workers were baby boomers reaching retirement age, and predicted a gap of 19,000 unfilled jobs by 2026. The Fond du Lac Youth Apprenticeship program is unique because the Fond du Lac Area Association of Commerce provides payroll services to all employers that participate in the program. Workmen’s comp insurance is one of the major issues employers have with working with students. This is especially true in manufacturing, welding, automotive and health care. Employers may resist mentoring students due to the added cost of placing them on their company policies. By outsourcing payroll to the chamber, the students are considered employees and are contracted to the host business for work.

**Results:** As of 2015, the program has 100 students, 16 different curricula, working for 60 employers. The program has graduated more than 950 students working for more than 150 employers.

Jessie Azrilian is ACCE’s director of education partnerships.